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***A Prison Without Bars: Refugee and Defector Testimonies of Severe Violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief in North Korea***

[Click here for the report in full color \(pdf 1.16 MB\)](#)

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\*\*Korean-language version\*\*  
of the report \(pdf 1.57 MB\)&nbsp;](#)

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**Tuesday, April 15, 2008, 1-2 p.m.**

**Cannon House Building, Room 340**

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WASHINGTON- The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom will release its updated report on religious freedom and related human rights in North Korea, entitled

*A Prison Without Bars: Refugee and Defector Testimonies of Severe Violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief in North Korea,*

at a press conference the day before South Korean President Lee Myung Bak is scheduled to arrive in Washington, D.C. for a summit with President Bush. The discussion of the report, with Commission Chair Michael Cromartie and Commissioners Nina Shea and Imam Talal Y. Eid, will be followed by a briefing, co-sponsored by the Congressional Korea Caucus.

*A Prison Without Bars*

offers fresh evidence regarding the grave situation of North Korean asylum seekers who have been forcibly repatriated from China back to North Korea.

Contrary to claims made by the Chinese government, repatriated North Koreans face severe persecution, including harsh interrogations, long-term imprisonment, and torture if they are found to have converted to Christianity or had contact with South Korean Christians or churches while in China.

The report provides evidence that the cult of personality surrounding Kim Jong Il and his family remains strong, and that Kim Jong Il's regime perceives any new religious activity as a security threat to be combated at all costs. As a result, stringent security measures have been enacted to stop the spread of religion, mostly Protestantism, through cross-border contacts with China.

*A Prison Without Bars*

follows up the Commission's 2005 study on North Korea's brutal suppression of religious freedom,

*Thank You Father Kim Il Sung.*

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The Commission's new report again presents the opportunity to gain insight into human rights conditions in the "Hermit Kingdom" by providing a channel for North Korean nationals to present their experiences to the international community.

According to refugees interviewed for the report:

- Apart from churches and temples in Pyongyang meant most to impress foreign tourists and guests, elements of Buddhism, Christianity, and traditional folk beliefs continue to exist in North Korea, in spite of the repression. Certain practices within Shamanism, such as fortune-telling, are widely practiced in defiance of government bans.
- Conditions along the China-North Korea border are uniquely hazardous for North Korean refugees, as security agents target refugees believed to have visited Chinese churches for food aid or other forms of immediate assistance.
- Refugees who admit under intense interrogation to having had contact with Christians while in China often receive particularly harsh punishments. As a result, many North Korean refugees must consciously avoid revealing any knowledge of Christianity or contact with China-based Christians.

According to former North Korean security agents, who were also interviewed for this report:

- There is increased police activity aimed at halting religious activities in the border regions with China-including setting up of mock prayer meetings to entrap new converts in North Korea, and training security agents in Christian traditions and practices for the purposes of infiltration of churches in China.
- North Korean security agents overseeing the detention and often brutal interrogation of North Korean refugees classify their efforts as "counterintelligence work," as it is believed that South Korean missionary activities aimed towards North Korean refugees is a cover for conducting espionage.
- The North Korean dictatorship draws a distinction between recent converts who acquired religion while in China, and "old believers," whose families have been multi-generational religious devotees. New religious converts are targeted for especially stringent punishments.

Immediately following the press conference, the Commission will conduct a congressional briefing on human rights in North Korea, jointly sponsored with the Congressional Korea Caucus. The briefing will feature David Hawk, a Reagan-Fascell Fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy; Peter Beck, Executive Director of the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea; and Jae Ku, Executive Director of the U.S.-Korea Institute at the School for Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University. Several Members of Congress are also expected to participate in the briefing.

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